

revolution in prices, gradual for the first
 third of
 the century, but after 1540 a mill race,
 injected a
 virus of hitherto unsuspected potency, at
 once a
 stimulant to feverish enterprise and an acid
 dissolving
 all customary relationships.

It was a society in rapid motion, swayed
 by new
 ambitions and haunted by new terrors, in
 which both
 success and failure had changed their
 meaning. Except

in the turbulent north, the aim of the great
 landowner
 was no longer to hold at his call an army of
 retainers,
 but to exploit his estates as a judicious
 investment*

The prosperous merchant, once content to
 win a posi-
 tion of dignity and power in fraternity or
 town, now
 flung himself into the task of carving his way
 to solitary
 pre-eminence, unaided by the artificial
 protection of
 gild or city. To the immemorial poverty of
 peasant

and craftsman, pitting, under the ever-
 present threat
 of famine, their pigmy forces against an
 implacable

nature, was added the haunting insecurity of
 a growing,
 though still small, proletariat, detached
 from their
 narrow niche in village or borough, the sport
 of social
 forces which they could neither understand,
 nor arrest,
 nor control.

(i)

- *The Land Question*

The England of the Reformation, to which
 posterity
 turns as a source of high debates on church

government
and doctrine, was to contemporaries a
cauldron seeth-
ing with economic unrest and social
passions. But the
material on which agitation fed had been
accumulating
for three generations, and of the
grievances which
exploded in the middle of the century, with
the excep-
tion of the depreciation of the currency,
there was not
one—neither enclosures and pasture
farming, nor
usury, nor the malpractices of guilds, nor
the rise in
prices, nor the oppression of craftsmen by
merchants,
nor the extortions of the engrosser—
which had not